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A Disciple of Plato

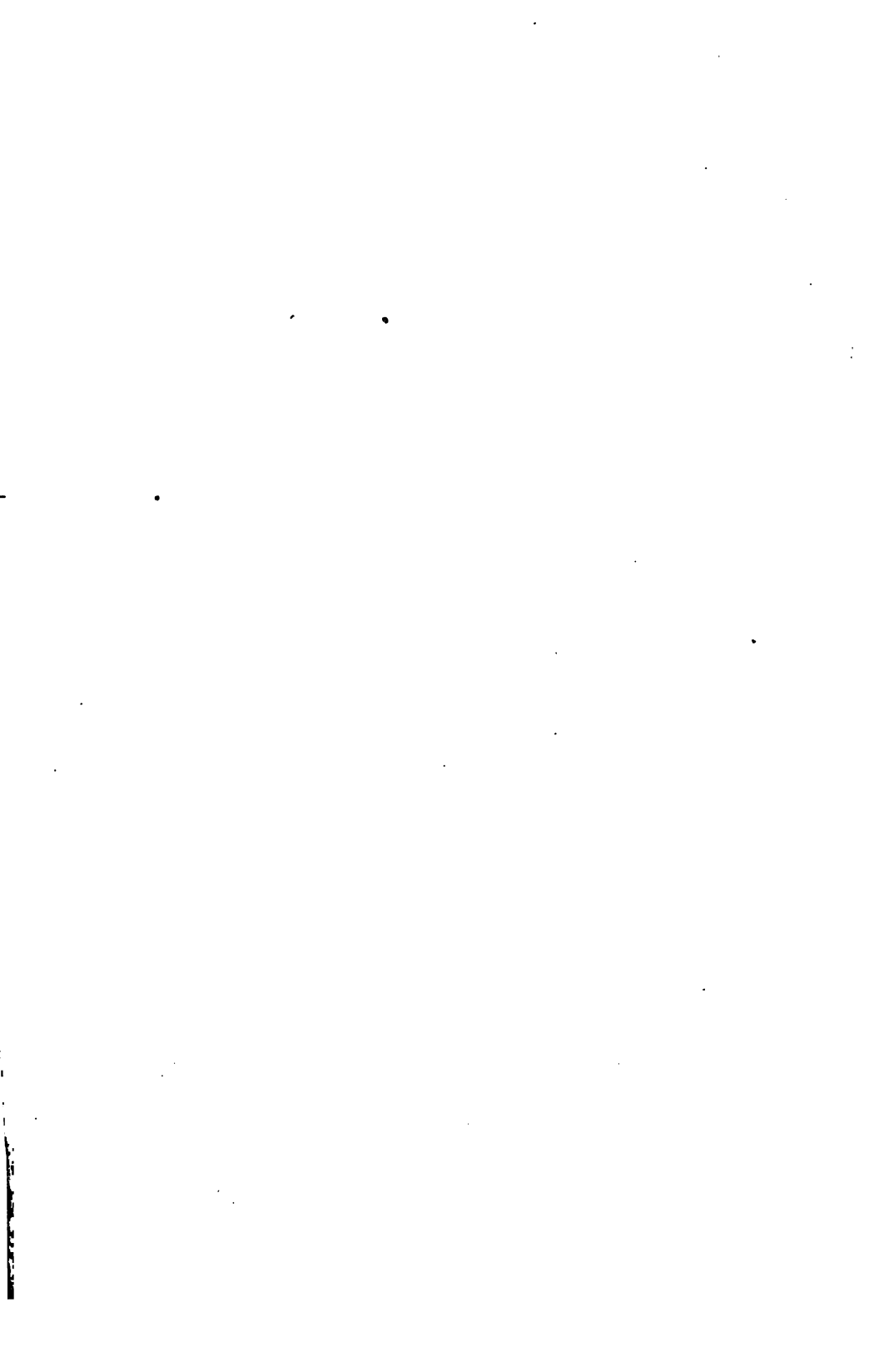
A CRITICAL STUDY
OF
JOHN RUSKIN

BY
WILLIAM SMART, M.A.

With a note by Mr Ruskin



GLASGOW
WILSON & M'CORMICK, SAINT VINCENT STREET
1883



A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each
moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in
the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is signed
by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

WALT WHITMAN.

A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

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A DISCIPLE OF PLATO.

"Be sure, if the author is worth anything, that you will not get at his meaning all at once;—nay, that at his whole meaning you will not for a long time arrive in any wise. Not that he does not say what he means, and in strong words too; but he cannot say it all; and what is more strange, *will* not, but in a hidden way and in parables, in order that he may be sure you want it." *

With these words of his own before me it may seem misdirected energy to attempt, as I have done in the following paper, to find out the central and essential teaching of John Ruskin. My excuse is that such an attempt seemed necessary in view of the great ignorance and misunderstanding that prevails as to what Ruskin really has taught.

"Read his 'Munera Pulveris,' 'Oxford Lectures on Art,' and whatever else he is now writing if you can manage to get them—which is difficult here owing to the ways he has towards the bibliopolic world," wrote Carlyle to Emerson: and although Ruskin is the most candid of writers, these "ways" explain much

* *Sesame and Lilies*, i., 13.

of the general ignorance regarding his writings. "He is the founder of some sort of Socialistic scheme," says a common report, and the mere mention of Socialism explains much of the misunderstanding.

Hence one who knows his writings, and knows also how much nonsense is talked about them by critics who have not troubled themselves to ascertain his *standpoint*, is constantly reminded of a very old text, "The Letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life." It happens continually that those who respect him as an art critic have no interest in his social teachings, while those who agree with him in his social views have no interest in his art work. Yet his teachings in both departments have been entirely homogeneous. If he says that there is no "wealth" but Life, he also says that greatness in Art is measured by the moral life of the workman. Let it be remembered that Ruskin's work in life has been Art Criticism; that he is now for the second time Slade Professor in Oxford; and yet that those who know him best consider him above all great as a preacher of life and conduct: and one may see that it is not unreasonable to ask, in the case of his writings, where the Letter reveals the Spirit, and where it hinders it?

That the spirit of a great man's teaching is not on the surface, is in fact generally mistaken by his own generation, is evident from this, that almost all great thinkers have had schools of disciples, who became in great measure rivals, even enemies of each other. We all know how variously the words of Christ himself have been interpreted, from the schisms that split the Church

into east and west, down to the latest divide of sectarianism. In philosophy the last great name, Hegel, is acknowledged as master by the rising school of Christian philosophy in this country, and by the extreme left of Nihilism in Germany. While for Ruskin at the present day all faiths are claimed, from the reddest Communism to the rankest Toryism.

And necessarily so. It is not so much that one school follows the Letter, and another the Spirit—the two are not always so distinct as make that possible; but that all great men are many-sided; are, in fact, at once broad and narrow. It is the penalty of greatness that disciples are sure to carry out one of the sides to the neglect of the others. And yet the search for truth is not to be thought a game of compromises. When one side of a thought or theory has been stated by one man, and the other side by another, you cannot always find the truth by splitting the difference. Truth lies not in any division, nor between the two, but is always the living union of sides which, in isolation, are contradictory. It is a well defined law of thought and progress, that when one aspect of truth is pushed too far, it shows its unreality by swinging round into its opposite. And the perpetual tendency of all great thinking, especially such thinking as makes for practical reform, is to accentuate unduly some one side, and push it to extremes. The very violence of such extreme draws attention to its falsity in that form, and brings out the championship of the other side; indeed, in a very great man, leads to reaction and self-contradiction. Hence the assumption that self-contradiction is the mark

of weakness or falsity is not always well-grounded. The consistent man is the narrow man, for he has to limit his sphere of vision to one side of every question. It is true that the great deeds of history have been done by men who fixed their eyes steadily on one thing, and refused to look beside or beyond it ; but they did so at the cost of having their work revised in another generation. The difference between a great thinker and a great reformer generally is, that the work of the former lies in finding out the contradictions and trying to reconcile them, while the latter passes by the unsolved contradiction, and unhesitatingly takes one side.

This law is seen both in individual systems and in historical evolutions. It explains how we find such a transcendent genius as Plato contradicting himself at various stages of his advance, and, as a whole, calling up the counterpart in Aristotle. In the same way Mill's *Economy* brings out what we might call the *Polity* of Ruskin. And it is worth noting that we find the profoundest example of this law in such a thorough-going contradiction as the two statements :—"He that is not for me is against me," and "He that is not against us is on our side."

On this account it seems to me that all great teachers, as certainly all great philosophers, must be studied historically. In themselves they are always either the counterpart or the summing up of thinkers that have preceded them, and in the course of their own writings they generally exhibit the opposition of thought I have mentioned.

Or, putting the matter in another aspect, might one not say

that the Genius and the Reformer come into collision in a great man. As a genius, he touches the world on many sides, all finding voice in him : like a finely strung instrument he vibrates to every impulse that comes from the heart of nature and of man. But by reason of this very sympathy the overwhelming sadness of human life touches him as it does not touch others. His nearness to God makes him more tenderly human, and in the end the intellect is overborne by the heart : he is forced to desert his own quiet work and rush into the arena of reform, and too often he blunts his weapons and saddens his life, in not recognizing that human misery is as old as the world, and is a problem for the gods to solve.

Indeed it is not given to any man to be alike great in all departments. Greatness comes very much of knowing what one is best fitted for, and recognizing the necessary limitations of life and strength. But few have the patience and the courage to pursue one work steadily, and let the innumerable cries of help from other fields fall upon deaf ears. The great man must, because he is human, essay upon fields which ordinary men know better, and his failures in this so-called practical sphere form favourite texts for the great army of small men to declaim—"See what a miserably ordinary mortal your hero is!" Equality has always been a favourite doctrine of those who would attain it by levelling down, not by levelling up—of which there is no better proof than the satisfaction with which the public have settled down to the opinion, that the key to Carlyle's philosophy was his Dyspepsia. The world takes very long to learn the double mean-

ing of that homely truth ;—" A man's a man for a' that " : to judge a man not by his failures but by his work, remembering, when all is said, that the distinction of Man is, not only that he is not a Beast, but that he is not a God.

These then are some of the difficulties that come up when we would try to get at the spirit of a man whose name has been one of the most famous in letters for nearly fifty years, and whose teachings are neither unknown nor yet much understood.

They can only be met, as I have indicated, by something like a historical survey of his literary life. And, first, one might enquire what were the chief sources of his inspiration. Who is the master whose teaching has principally moulded his thought? "It is always the first sign of a dominant and splendid intellect, that it knows of whom to learn."* Ruskin, we may be assured, is no Paracelsus. If he has anything worth telling it did not come by mere intuition, but is a superstructure on foundations laid by the mighty thinkers of the past. There is no royal road, as he has said, to any place worth going to. Intuition has its place, but that place is, not to supplant the accumulated wealth of past thought, but to interpret it. To trust *only* to the divine vision is to be deceived by the false fire.

The world, indeed, seldom realizes how much it owes to previous thinkers, and how thought, like history, repeats itself. Speaking generally, one need not be astonished to find modern

* The Art of England, i., 6.

systems of thought grounded in the writings of the great Greeks. Do we not, for instance, find the central thought of Darwinism, the containing of every lower species by the genus above it, from the simplest atom to the completed organism, in Aristotle—except that Aristotle carried up every species to its completion in God? And is not the whole idea of Carlyle's Clothes' philosophy to be found in the following passage from the *Gorgias* :—

“In the days of Cronos there existed a law respecting the destiny of man, which has always been, and still continues to be, in Heaven,—that he who has lived all his life in justice and holiness, shall go, when he dies, to the Islands of the Blessed, and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil ; but that he who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus. And in the time of Cronos, and even later in the reign of Zeus, the judgment was given on the very day on which the men were to die ; the judges were alive, and the men were alive ; and the consequence was that the judgments were not well given. Then Pluto and the authorities from the Islands of the Blessed came to Zeus and said that the souls found their way to the wrong places. Zeus said : ‘I shall put a stop to this ; the judgments are not well given, and the reason is that the judged have their clothes on, for they are alive ; and there are many having evil souls who are apparelled in fair bodies, or wrapt in wealth or rank, and when the day of judgment arrives many witnesses come forward and witness on their behalf that they have lived righteously. The judges are awed by them, and they themselves too have their

clothes on when judging ; their eyes and ears and their whole bodies are interposed as a veil before their own souls. All this is a hindrance to them ; there are the clothes of the judges and the clothes of the judged.—What is to be done ? I will tell you :— In the first place, I will deprive men of the foreknowledge of death, which they at present possess ; that is a commission of which I have already entrusted the execution to Prometheus : in the second place, they shall be entirely stripped before they are judged, for they shall be judged when they are dead ; and the judge too shall be naked, that is to say, dead : he with his naked soul shall pierce into the other naked soul, and they shall die suddenly and be deprived of all their kindred, and leave their brave attire strewn upon the earth ; conducted in this manner the judgment will be just.”*

I think I am not far wrong in saying that one at least of Ruskin's masters is Plato. To what extent this following of Plato is conscious and intentional, and to what extent it came to him *through* general culture, it would not be easy to say. “Out of Plato came all things that are still written and debated among men of thought. Great havoc makes he among our originalities. In proportion to the culture of men they become his scholars, making it impossible to think, on certain levels, except through him,” said Emerson.

But I do not mean that isolated thoughts only are to be found

* Gorgias, 523.

similar in both. I mean that Ruskin has adopted, *in toto*, some of the great Platonic conceptions as they stand in the Republic and the Laws, and has worked them out under the new conditions of modern life and society.

Perhaps it may not be out of place to remind even cultured readers that the "Republic" of Plato is the ideal reconstruction of a Greek State, on the basis of the Platonic conception of Justice. It is the longest of the Dialogues with the exception of the Laws, being in ten books of about an hour's reading each. It begins by discussing the current theories of Justice, dismissing them in turn, till the true conception is formulated something like this :—Justice is, from the side of society, the assigning to each man his due place in the social system ; and from the side of the citizen, his keeping that place, fulfilling his duties in it, and respecting the place of every other. Starting from this as his principle Plato constructs his ideal State, entering minutely into the education and surrounding of the citizen,—especially as regards Art and Religion ; and the true theory of government as contrasted with the various systems which had had ample experiment in the stormy life of Greece : in short, the meaning and end of a State, and the methods by which such end is to be obtained.

The "Laws" of Plato, on the other hand, was written much later, and, from a literary point of view, bears much the same relation to the "Republic" as "Paradise Regained" to "Paradise Lost." It is inferior in every way but one, and is evidently the work of a man who saw that the City of God he had dreamed of in his youth was not to be founded in his

day, nor much approach made to it; and who had concluded that the best thing he could do was to draw out such counsels as could be carried into practice in any reasonable scheme of colonization or emigration.

In this, it is worth noting, it has no small resemblance to Ruskin's own procedure in writing the "*Fors Clavigera*." At a time when most men would think their work well over (being nearly sixty years old), Ruskin was not content to have written of Art as no man had ever written before him, but began the "*Fors*" thus:—

"I cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. Therefore, I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery."*

The fundamental idea then, as I have said, of the "*Republic*," and, in a lesser degree, of the "*Laws*," is Justice. It is the end of statesmanship that each man should be put in the place for which he is best fitted, and, once placed, should be kept there for life. The citizen's method of living was not to be an individual choice, or a matter of competition, but a thing for the State to decide. That the governed classes would find their truest happiness thus he was confident. What more should a man want than to fill the place Heaven had destined for him? As for the govern-

* *Fors*, i., 3.

ing classes, to the objection that theirs would be a life of severe work, he simply answered :—

“ Even if so, there would not be anything wonderful in their still being the happiest of men ; but let that pass, for our object in the construction of the State is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any one class ; and in a State which is ordered with a view to the good of the whole, we think we are most likely to find Justice.”*

In short, that “ No man liveth to himself,” was to Plato not a mere theory, but the very spirit of law and justice.

It needs no genius to see that where citizens are but men, this rigid justice could only be carried out by the strong hand ; and therefore we find the Republic resolve itself into an Aristocracy, a government of the *ἀριστοι*, the best men. To find these best men was the problem ; which solved, the rest would be easy.

In this general view of the end and method of statesmanship, Ruskin seems to me entirely to agree. The key to all the strangeness of his social views lies in this, that he considers the healthy and happy life of *all* the citizens the sole end of legislation, and a tyranny of the wisest its method. *Laissez Faire* has no place in the ideal state of either Plato or Ruskin. The greatest achievements of commerce, the hugest expansion of national wealth, the proudest stretching of empire is nothing, if any large proportion of the citizens are herded together in squalor and wretchedness.

* Republic, iv., 420.

This being the key to both systems I shall return to it later, and, meanwhile, I must point out that, not merely in general plan, but in matters of practical detail, Ruskin has taken Plato for his master.

Such ideas as the following are conspicuous in both :— that Education is a matter for the whole life and not for youth only : that one of its necessary conditions consists in surrounding the youth with fair sights and beautiful sounds : that Poetry and Art should be regulated to serve certain ethical ends and not be left to individual caprice, any more than the providing for the nation should be left to unlimited competition : that the consummation of Education should be to make, and of Art, to portray the beautiful soul harmonizing with the beautiful body : that Reverence and Obedience are virtues of all noble life : that the good man is a willing servant; and only the meaner sort of man independent and fearless : that severe restrictions should be placed on private fortunes—"the citizen must be happy and good," says Plato, "but very rich and very good at the same time he cannot be" : that every man should practise one thing only, that being the thing to which his nature is most perfectly adapted, and that the ambition which makes a man want to be better off than nature intended him to be is the "ruin of the State." Then we have the entire prohibition of Usury, of Credit, of two prices in trading, and of immoderate competition generally.

Lastly, there is repeated reference in both writers to the sphere of opinion as compared with that of exact thought. In Ruskin

these are very striking. Witness that passage in "Sesame and Lilies" ending: "A very little honest study will enable you to perceive that what you took for your own 'judgment' was mere chance prejudice, and drifted, helpless, entangled weed of castaway thought; nay, you will see that most men's minds are indeed little better than rough heath wilderness, neglected and stubborn, partly barren, partly overgrown with pestilent brakes, and venomous wind sown herbage of evil surmise."* Or the fiery answer to the question: "must I not act according to the dictates of my conscience?"—"By no means, my conscientious friend, unless you are quite sure that yours is not the conscience of an ass."†

In Plato the place of subjective opinion is as clear:—"Do you not know, I said, that all mere opinions are *bad*, and the best of them blind";—and forms in fact one of the best known characteristics of the Platonic philosophy.

Here are two striking passages on Retail Trading, which show how clearly both writers witness that reform in all things must be led by the upper classes. The first is from the "Laws":—"The mass of mankind do not observe moderation, and when they might gain in moderation they prefer gains without limit; wherefore all that relates to retail trade and merchandise, and keeping of taverns, is denounced and numbered among dishonourable things. Now that a man goes to desert places and builds houses which can only be reached by long journeys, for the sake of retail trade, and receives strangers who are in need at the desired resting places, and gives them peace and calm when they are

* Sesame and Lilies, i., 26.

† Fors, liv.

tossed by the storm, or cool shade in the heat ; and then, instead of behaving to them as friends, and showing the duties of hospitality to his guests, treats them as enemies and captives who are at his mercy, and will not release them till they have paid the highest, most abominable, and dishonest price ;—these are the sort of practices—and foul evils they are—which cast a reproach upon the succour of adversity. For if (what I trust may never be, and will not be) we were to compel, if I may venture to say a ridiculous thing, the best men everywhere to keep taverns for a time, or carry on retail trade, or do anything of that sort ; or if, in consequence of some dire necessity, the best women were compelled to follow a similar calling, then we should know how agreeable and pleasant all these things are ; and all such occupations, if they were carried on as according to pure reason, would be honoured as we honour a mother or a nurse.” *

Compare with this Ruskin's words : “ If we duly recognise the laws of God about meats and drinks, there will for every labourer and traveller, be such chancing upon meat and drink and other entertainment as shall be sacredly pleasant to him. And there cannot indeed be at present imagined a more sacred function for young Christian men than that of hosts or hospitallers, supplying, to due needs, and with proper maintenance of their own lives, wholesome food and drink to all men : so that as, at least, always at one end of a village there may be a holy church and vicar, so at the other end of the village there may be a holy tavern and

* Laws, xi., 918.

tapster ministering the good creatures of God, so that they may be sanctified by the Word of God and His Providence." *

What at once strikes one on reading the "Republic" is the question, whether Plato was in earnest in representing such a state as practicable. It is the same question one feels inclined to ask of Ruskin. Did Plato think that a system of government running counter to all the individual interests of men, and founded on a purely ethical principle, would be entertained, and even if entertained, would last?

We may be quite sure that Plato met very much the same ridicule and indifference from the practical people of Athens, as Ruskin does from the business men of our day. The region of pure thought has in all ages been an ether that the average man finds too rare for comfort. Since the Christian era he has indeed a religion which lifts him above the sordid interests of life, and assures him that the Life is more than meat. But it may be questioned how much such a religion is really believed in, when we find how little thought is given to any higher ideal of life than the mere money-making one. That the whole conduct of man's life should be a religion, and rounded by conformity to a spiritual law within him, of this he has no idea; and so he puts the best energies of his being into concerns that are individual and selfish.

Let it at once be confessed that Philosophy and Practical Politics occupy different spheres. In this way Plato answers: "Oh, my friends, do not suppose me ignorant that there is a certain

* Fors, xxxvi., 5.

degree of truth in your objections ; but I am of opinion that, in matters which are not present but future, he who exhibits a pattern of that at which he aims, should in nothing fall short of the fairest and truest." * In other words, "the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen." And, even if the Republic were confessed to be for ever outside the reach of practical politics, it might well be that, as Plato says, "In Heaven there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order." †

But, apart from this, it might be answered that Plato's communism was more possible than Ruskin's, inasmuch as the Greek States were small, perfectly organic, and therefore easily moved by any great reformer or leader.

Be this as it may, the interesting point for us is, that the solution of the problem in both cases is looked for *in the same direction*.

"What is the least change," asked Plato, "which will enable a State to pass into the truer form? Just this one change, which is not a slight or easy, though still a possible one. Attend to me. Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who follow either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never cease from ill—no, nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day." ‡

* Laws, v., 746. † Republic, ix., 592. ‡ Republic, v., 473.

Who does not remember Carlyle's Fortieth Article which includes all the other Thirty-Nine;—"Human Intellect, if you consider it well, is the exact summary of Human *Worth*; and the essence of all worth-ships and worships is reverence for that same. True it for ever remains that Intellect is the real object of reverence, and of devout prayer, and zealous wish and pursuit, among the sons of men; and even, well understood, the one object. It is the Inspiration of the Almighty that giveth men understanding. For it must be repeated, and ever again repeated till poor mortals get to discern it, and awake from their baleful paralysis and degradation under foul enchantments, that a man of intellect, of real and not sham Intellect, is by the nature of him likewise inevitably a man of nobleness, a man of courage, rectitude, pious strength; who, even *because* he is and has been loyal to the Laws of this Universe, is initiated into *discernment* of the same; to this hour a Missioned of Heaven; whom if men follow, it will be well with them; whom, if men do not follow, it will not be well."*

In the same way Ruskin takes up and expounds over and over again this Gospel of Might:—"Nature and heaven command you, at your peril, to discern worth from unworth in everything, and most of all in man. Your main problem is that ancient and trite one: 'Who is best man?' and the Fates forgive much,—forgive the wildest, fiercest, cruellest experiments—if fairly made for the determination of that."†

* Latter Day Pamphlets, iii. † Fors, xiv., 7.

Now here we have the central idea of statesmanship stated according to three greatest writers. Is there any recognition of this "question of questions" in modern statescraft? Is it true that what we call Conservatism has for its end to find out the best men, and put itself under their leading; or that what we call Radicalism would wrest the power from the few great to bestow it on the many little? The one answer is as true as the other. You cannot find out any great conscious tendency in a political party, so long as wise men and fools are not banded on separate sides. Unlike the Greeks, we work towards our ends slowly, almost unconsciously. But as the world is yet governed by Reason, we work towards the same ends. The Spirit of an Age is in fact greater than it knows. A nation seldom acts consciously on any principle; and assuredly its spirit does not reside exclusively in any of the political parties which are its instruments. Who doubts that the spirit of this age is Democracy? Not Democracy as some would interpret it,—Mob Law; but Democracy as the great seers have seen it,—the development of the Reformation principle, the right of Reason alone to rule; the union of men as free intelligences, governing themselves in the new power of self-government that comes to a nation when all its citizens *think*. "All Democracy lies in this," as Carlyle says, "not that the noble soul, born poor, should be set to spout in Parliament, but that he should be set to assist in governing men." For what is the first thing that men do when they come to their senses, but follow that clearest dictate of reason—put themselves under the leadership of the Fittest?

Not of the wealthiest, observe ; not of the best born. Fitness to rule does not come with successful speculation, nor with hereditary idleness. Plato would say the only fit man to rule was the Philosopher. Ruskin would say that among our English Squires may even yet be found the best material for governing men. Carlyle said the Leaders of Industry, if Industry is ever led, are virtually the Captains of the world. But whoever he be, he must be found by standard of Reason, not by any fetish-worship of money or rank. How long it will be till great nations recognise that the right of self-government involves the corresponding duty of educating its leaders by a special training, it is hard to say. We who recognise the gravity of the issue have no right to leave either the choice or the education to hap-hazard.

Hear what Plato proposes in the selection of his governing class, and compare it with our ways of selecting the same. After training the most promising youths—for Plato, like Carlyle, would have us deal only with the best material—in the ordinary Greek accomplishments, a selection was to be made of those fit for higher honours. From the age of twenty to thirty, they were to study science and the natural relation of the sciences. At thirty a further selection was to be made and the chosen few be introduced gently to philosophy. This study was to continue for five years, at the end of which they were to be sent into active working life,—not as leaders, but as workers, to be tried and proved in all sorts of ways. This stage was to last fifteen years. And so, when fifty years old, the few who stood all trials would come to their con-

summation : "The time has now arrived at which they must raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things, and behold the absolute good : for that is the pattern according to which they are to order the State, and the lives of individuals, and the remainder of their own lives also, making philosophy their chief pursuit : but, when their turn comes, toiling also at politics and ruling for the public good, not as if they were doing some great thing, but of necessity : and when they have brought up others like themselves, and left them in their place to be governors of the State, then they will depart to the Islands of the Blest, and dwell there."* And all this is "not a mere dream, and although difficult not impossible, but only possible when the true philosopher kings, one or more of them are born in a State, despising the honours of this present world, which they deem mean and worthless ; above all, esteeming right and the honour that springs from right, and regarding Justice as the greatest and most necessary of all things—whose ministers they are, and whose principles will be exalted by them, when they set in order their own city." †

But where in all this is Liberty ? Exactly where one might expect to find it—realizing itself in sacrifice. In other words, the only Liberty thinking men have ever thought worth having, both for governing and governed, is the liberty that *subordinates itself*. This is Ruskin's Liberty, this is Carlyle's Liberty ; and I think I am justified in saying, that such Liberty is no more and no less than the Platonic Justice.

* Republic, vii., 540.

† Republic, vii., 540.

Having said so much of the direct influence of Plato on Ruskin, I go on to point out what seems to me one of the great aims of his life. Every reader of the "Fors" knows that emphatically it may be said of him—"from a child he has known the Holy Scriptures." It is evident enough to every literary student, that his wonderful style was mainly formed on the English translation of these Scriptures; and it is well known that Ruskin was brought up in unquestioning acceptance of their most literal interpretation. But as one reads his books in their order of time, it is not difficult to see where he passed from the implicit belief of a narrow theology to broader grounds. A history of that sort can perhaps only be read between the lines; but I seem to see that the result is, that for a time he is perplexed between the antagonistic spirits of the fiery Jew and the calm Greek; till he learns that religion is greater than all theologies, and the deep heart of man a nobler temple than any built by hands. However this may be, it is certain that he comes at last to recognise that the higher faith does not overturn the simpler, but embraces it; that the gospel of the many is also the gospel for the few; and that heaven is wide enough to cover with its arch all the beautiful forms of thought and faith that have ever flourished under it.

In other words, much of Ruskin's work has been the attempt to unite Hellenic and Christian ideals.

This is indeed no new thing for thinkers. It is but a shallow mind that comes in sight of the literature and history of Greece, without feeling that we have there an aspect of life

very much neglected by us ; an aspect, in fact, in many respects greater than our own. In the best of the Greek States, and in the ever present ideal of the Greek State, the individual citizen found the only freedom intelligible to him, and the State reached its highest conception of the whole in every part, and every part in the whole. A Greek State was organic, realizing its unity in difference. The one spirit breathing in all the members, it was not a congeries of individual elements bound together by an external bond of law and order, imposed by the many in self-protection from each other. Our modern States, realizing, as they do, Mandeville's epigram :—

“ Every part was full of vice,
Yet the whole mass a Paradise,”

would have appeared to a Greek as “ Anarchy plus a Street Constable.” A Greek lived for his State : considered it as his very self written large. The feeling was kept alive by all manner of common occupations and enjoyments. Indeed the perpetual struggle among the several States for supremacy and even life, made what we call *esprit de corps* a necessity among citizens ; for every citizen was a soldier. Everything reminded him that he was a member of an organization greater than himself, yet of which he made an essential living part.

The consequence was that the Greek States had, for the most part, one only form of aristocracy, the aristocracy of brains. The best men invariably rose to the top. Society was not a slow

evolution as with us, where it takes a long, almost unconscious process till the little leaven leavens the whole lump. A wise tyrant or an eloquent teacher had it in his power to carry through the most gigantic reforms.

It is sober truth then, that what we call now the religion of humanity existed to a high degree in Greece, as religion of the State. The individual was subordinated to the common weal. Man realized his entire dependence on other men, and so practically learned that he was his brother's keeper. This is the explanation of Plato's confidence in the feasibility of his Republic. When we remember that in Sparta the State took entire control of marriages, interfered in innumerable ways with family life, forbade all trading, banished all poets and artists, and enacted the most rigid sumptuary laws, it becomes evident that the extreme communism of Plato needed no other excuse to satisfy a Greek than that it was for the good of the State.

In its central idea then, (I do not say in its actuality), here is the perfect conception of human life: the annihilation of the individual self as self,—the realizing of the brotherhood of mankind,—the religion of humanity.

Now all this was changed when the Greek States lost their freedom, first before the conqueror of Macedonia, and then under the iron heel of Rome. Philosophy, which in the Republic had dreamt that the kingdom of God was within reach, shrunk into itself, and sought peace in the ideal of the Wise Man—the self-contained individual. Liberty was lost; and, in the loss, thought found no place for its foot in the kingdoms of this world.

On this great dead level of external law and internal dispeace, Christianity broke—literally in the fulness of time. The world was at the feet of Rome. Its society was a fever of luxury ; its religion a kind of despair. Thought already had retired to the desert, when Christ's words flushed the world with light. Immortality,—another world,—a personal God;—these but the dim speculations of a few poets and philosophers hitherto, were now given to the world of common men with all the force of direct divine revelation, and man again was free. But the scene of his freedom was changed. Not to realize himself on Earth, but to prepare for Heaven, was henceforward the dominant tone. For much later times was it reserved to read aright the lesson of the Master.

Now came the inevitable conflict between Paganism and Christianity. The result is history. Christianity conquered ; and for a time the kingdoms of the world became the Kingdoms of our Lord ;—only to fall back again in gradual corruption, till the incoherent elements of secular power and spiritual rule again broke asunder—the result being as before, that all aspiration was directed from this world to another. Here then the beginning of that long schism of Church and World, which has, down to the present, blinded men to the fact, that man's work is *in* this world, and his religion and himself to be realized in it.* All down this long period the ruling idea is the text, "My

* One may be pardoned referring to Matthew Arnold's "Obermann Once More" in this connexion ; the power of poetic genius to interpret the spirit of history has never to my mind been so clearly instanced as in this poem.

kingdom is not of this world ;” leaving out of sight the corollary, —“The Kingdom of God is within you.” In Calvinism this former aspect has been pointedly presented in the dogma of original sin, and in the many doctrines that assume, if they do not assert, that the body is the prison of the soul, that the passions are the instruments of the evil one, that this world is the antithesis of a higher.

Now to say that this separation of church and world, of earth and heaven, of man and God, and this subordination of the world we know to the world we guess, seemed to Ruskin fundamentally wrong, is only to say that Ruskin was an artist. To one who has eyes to see the glory and wonder of creation, it needs no philosophy to tell that the Kingdoms of this World are at least good enough to be the Kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ ; and that, in very deed, “The earth hath *God* given to the children of men.”

But then the Artist must go back to Greece, for to Greece the most perfect forms of artistic beauty belong. And the question which naturally rises is,—how could Greece in her Paganism reach an ideal of human society and a perfection of art which we cannot yet touch? The answer is simple enough. The Greek frankly took what the gods provided, and enjoyed it. His heaven was here. The other world, if there were any, was a thing to be staved off as long as possible. At best, death was a sad necessity, but there was no thought of any preparation for it which could interfere with his duty in the present. True, the shadow of Fate haunted him ; but Fate was not an external law, but a part

and parcel of his own life. For the most part his Gods were glorified men, who, as men, were either indifferent or appeasable. This seems to me, on the whole, a fair view to take of the Greek religion ; for I think that we must put out of court the deep questionings of the greater minds like Sophocles, and conclude that the ordinary, like the philosophic Greek, thought that such questions did not matter very much, so long as they did not interfere with the morality and order of the State.

Against this, in modern times we have put, as I have already said, what might be called the religion and culture of Otherworldliness. The deep shade of a mystery before and a mystery after hangs over all our thoughts, while great religious bodies are even yet teaching, as a first principle, that man's chief concern is with a life to come.

Now we seem to find in Ruskin something like the summing-up of this long period of conflicting thought ; and this is precisely what we might expect in a great man, as the meeting point of all past cultures.

The two great conflicting lines I have indicated are, be it understood, these:—from the time of Plato on the one hand, and Epicurus on the other, philosophy and religion have hovered between heaven and earth ; sometimes with Spinoza losing all things in God ; sometimes with Hume denying everything but the sensational. The struggle between the two, with the varying fate of each at different stages, can be read clearly enough in the history of philosophy—from Descartes, in the beginning of modern thought, claiming freedom to doubt in all departments except that fenced

in by the Church, down to Hegel in the end, gathering up all the tangled lines of past philosophies, and working out the organic wholeness of all things in God.

And is not the converging of the two lines witnessed in the sonorous words of St. George's Oath, which, I imagine, may be taken as the summary of Ruskin's religion :—

- I.—I trust in the Living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible. I trust in the kindness of His law, and the goodness of His work. And I will strive to love Him, and keep His law, and see His work, while I live.
- II.—I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fulness of its mercy, and the joy of its love. And I will strive to love my neighbour as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did.
- III.—I will labour, with such strength and opportunity as God gives me, for my own daily bread ; and all that my hand finds to do, I will do with my might.
- IV.—I will not deceive, or cause to be deceived, any human being for my gain or pleasure ; nor hurt, or cause to be hurt, any human being for my gain or pleasure ; nor rob, or cause to be robbed, any human being for my gain or pleasure.
- V.—I will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty, upon the earth.
- VI.—I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness ; not in rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and

honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.

VII.—I will obey all the laws of my own country faithfully ; and the orders of its monarch, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its monarch, so far as such laws or commands are consistent with what I suppose to be the law of God ; and when they are not, or seem in anywise to need change, I will oppose them loyally and deliberately, not with malicious, concealed, or disorderly violence.*

If I read Ruskin aright in this regard, his charge against modern modes of thought is : first, that we do not recognise the sacredness of Nature as the revelation of God, and of man as the interpreter of God in Nature ; but constantly separate the two, and think that man can live a noble life independently of beauty, and that beauty can exist independently of man ; whereas the world we live in is the world we make, and to hurt either is to hurt both : and second, that we make too much in our religion of the compensating functions of a *future* life, and too little of the divinity of man in *this*. Is not the present-day world's judgment on Nature very much this ;—There is no beauty but Utility, and Utility has nothing to do with Beauty : and on Man ;—Every man for himself, and Devil take the hindmost ?

What I have tried to do thus far is : first, to point out the direct influence of Plato on Ruskin ; and, second, to indicate what I conceive to be one great aim of Ruskin's life, uniting Hel-

* Fors, lviii.

lenic and Christian ideals. Guided by these clues, I shall try now to point out, in some sort, the leading ideas of his early and later writings, following in this his own hint: "in many arts and attainments, the first and last stages of progress—the infancy and the consummation—have many features in common, while the intermediate stages are wholly unlike either, and are farthest from the right." If I am at all right in what I said before, we should find the confirmation of it in this way.

Let us begin with the "Seven Lamps of Architecture." Its main teaching I think, is this :—

Architecture is great just as it is the production of a *MAN*, working up to the height of his capacity, doing his work joyously, and putting his whole life in it because his work is also his pleasure—"noble or ignoble in proportion to the fulness of life of which it bears evidence." "We have certain work to do for our bread, and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily; neither is to be done by halves and shifts, but with a will, and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all."

Further, true work is not done for hire or reward, but as a duty; yet a duty which is man's highest right, his self-assertion—"his very self cut into the stone, and left there for a memorial;" its sufficient acknowledgment that of "well done, good and faithful servant." *Servant*, observe; for the whole principle of such work is Obedience :—"the highest greatness and the highest wisdom are shown, the first by a noble submission to, the second by a thoughtful providence for, certain voluntarily admitted

restraints." And this submission is to come in two ways—by veneration for the works of God, and knowledge of the powers and meaning of Man:—"all lovely forms and thoughts are directly taken from natural objects, and as these objects are the most common, the world becomes sacred even in its commonest aspects; amid all which man stands out as the great problem."

And lastly, all such work is not for ourselves, but for the great common weal of man—not in Godless competition for the sake of present living, but in enduring faith that the next age needs our work. "Men cannot benefit those that are with them as they can benefit those who come after them, and of all the pulpits from which human voice is ever sent forth, is none from which it reaches so far as from the grave."*

These I think to be the main lessons of the "Seven Lamps." If one might sum up in a word, it would be:—Architecture is only great as it expresses the obedient loving work of *Man*.

Turning now to "Modern Painters," the chief ideas—so far as one can condense such a work—seem to me these.

In the main we have all the great lessons of the "Seven Lamps," in the assertion of what constitutes goodness and greatness of work both in art and conduct. I give them shortly in the *ipsissima verba*.

"The thoroughly great men are those who have done everything thoroughly, and who, in a word, have never despised anything, however small, of God's making." No respect is due in art to any work done under a man's best. Work done, not for

* Seven Lamps of Architecture, 43, 105, 174, 186. Edit. 1880.

ire, "for no pay is indeed receivable by any true man ; but power is receivable by him in the love and faith you give him; . . . as the flower is gnawed by frost, so every human heart is gnawed by faithlessness."* And work done under severest self-restraint—for the following of beauty brings the artist always under a sterner dominion of mysterious law, "brightness being continually based upon obedience, and all majesty only another form of submission." †

The exact current contrary of all this was happily formulated in an *Athenæum* criticism quoted in the introduction to Vol. I., Second Edition, which runs thus:—"Landscape painting must not be reduced to mere portraiture of inanimate substances, Denner-like portraiture of the earth's face. Ancient landscapists took a broader, deeper, higher view of their art ; they neglected particular traits and gave only general features. Thus they attained mass and force, harmonious union and simple effect, the elements of grandeur and beauty." To which Ruskin's answer was : "It is just as impossible to generalize granite and slate, as it is to generalize a man and a cow. An animal must be either one animal or another animal ; it cannot be a general animal, or it is no animal : and so a rock must be either one rock or another rock ; it cannot be a general rock, or it is no rock. If there were a creature in the foreground of a picture, of which he could not decide whether it was a pony or a pig, the *Athenæum* critic would perhaps affirm it to be a generalization of pony and

* V. 351.

† V. 150.

pig, and consequently a high example of 'harmonious union and simple effect.' But *I* should call it simple bad drawing." *

Besides these repeated ideas, we have the following new lines of thought. Of the design and scope of "Modern Painters," he says ;—"The main aim and principle of the book is that it declares the perfectness and the eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to, that." †

As to the first, the perfectness of the work of God ;—"There is need," he says, "bitter need, to bring back into men's minds, that to live is nothing, unless to live be to know Him by whom we live ; and that He is not to be known by marring his fair works, and blotting out the evidence of His influences upon His creatures ; not amid the hurry of crowds and crash of innovation, but in solitary places, and out of the glowing intelligences which he gave to men of old." ‡ "This we know, that there will come a time when the service of God shall be the beholding of Him." § "We see that Dante, as the great prophetic exponent of the Middle Ages, has, by the lips of the spirit of Matilda, declared the mediæval faith ;—that all perfect active life was 'the expression of man's delight in *God's work*,'" || this passage "embodying in a few syllables the *sealing* difference between the Greek and the mediæval, in that the former sought the flower herb for his own uses, the latter for God's honour ;" ¶—these two

* Preface xxx., 2nd Ed.

† V. Preface xi., xii.

‡ II., 7.

§ II., 132.

|| III., 223.

¶ III., 224.

aims, observe, being exactly the two sides which I said that Ruskin has tried to unite.

As to the second, the work of man;—"In these books of mine," he says, "their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope. Arising first not in any desire to explain the principles of art, but in the endeavour to defend an individual painter from injustice, they have been coloured throughout,—nay, continually altered in shape, and even warped and broken, by digressions respecting social questions, which had for me an interest tenfold greater than the work I had been forced into undertaking. Every principle of painting which I have stated is traced to some vital or spiritual fact; and in my works on architecture the preference accorded finally to one school over another, is founded on a comparison of their influence on the life of the workman—a question by all other writers on the subject of architecture wholly forgotten or despised." *

The reason of this constant reference to man is simply that he is the Sun of creation, the mirror of the mind of God. "A mirror, dark, distorted, broken, use what blameful terms you please of its state; yet in the main, a true mirror, out of which alone, and by which alone, we can know anything of God at all—a tremulous crystal, waved as water poured out upon the ground;—you may defile it, despise it, pollute it, at your pleasure, and at your peril; for on the peace of those weak waves must all the heaven you shall ever gain be first seen;

* V., 201.

and through such purity as you can win for those dark waves, must all the light of the risen Sun of righteousness be bent down, by faint refraction. Cleanse them, and calm them, as you love your life. Therefore it is that all the power of nature depends on subjection to the human soul." *

And so all great art is one of two things, or both of them—the expression of man's delight in God's work, or the expression of man's delight in man as the most wonderful piece of God's workmanship.

"All art which involves no reference to man is inferior or nugatory. And all art which involves misconception of man, or base thought of him, is in that degree false and base."† Therefore all the great artists made failure and wreck in proportion that they separated man from nature, or man from God—from Angelico, habitually incognisant of any earthly pleasure, to Turner painting "the labour of men, their sorrow, and their death," living without faith, and dying without hope.

These thoughts serve to explain two principal theories of art peculiar to Ruskin.

The first is his definition of great art:—"That art is the greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas."‡ "No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution is able to outweigh one grain or fragment of thought." And again, "the difference between great and mean art lies wholly in the nobleness of the end to which the effort of the painter is addressed, . . .

* V., 203-205.

† V., 206-207.

‡ I., 7-11.

so that true criticism of art never can consist in the mere application of rules ; it can be just only when it is founded on quick sympathy with the innumerable instincts and changeful efforts of human nature, chastened and guided by unchanging love of all things that God has created to be beautiful, and pronounced to be good." *

The second theory of art is that it is an inspiration—"not a teachable nor gainable thing, but *the expression of the mind of a God-made great man* ; that, teach or preach, or labour as you will, everlasting difference is set between one man's capacity and another's, and that this God-given supremacy is the priceless thing, always just as rare in the world at one time as another."†

The practical result of all which teaching gives us the lesson of Ruskin's own life—perhaps Ruskin's greatest lesson—that for all but the heaven-made great men, the proper work is not what is called original production, but the reverent study and explication of the thought of others.

"Modern Painters" cannot be summed up more perfectly than in his own words :—"It teaches the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to that."

To come now to the "Stones of Venice"—analysis getting easier as we find that the ideas of "Modern Painters" and the "Seven Lamps" are applied practically here—note first the general summing-up exactly as before. "Here, therefore, let me finally and firmly enunciate the great principle to which all that has

* III., 23.

† III., 147-148.

hitherto been stated is subservient:—that art is valuable or otherwise, only as it expresses the personality, activity, and living perception of a good and great human soul; that it may express and contain this with little help from execution, and less from science; and that if it have not this, if it show not the vigour, perception and invention of a mighty human spirit, it is worthless. Worthless, I mean, as *Art*; it may be precious in some other way, but, as art, it is nugatory.”*

Much of the book is technical and historical, and cannot be condensed. Briefly, it tells how Venice wrote her history in the stone. It begins with the foundation that she laid, on the barren marshes of the Adriatic, in the reverent worship of God, and the helpful service of man—“that first and fairest Venice which rose out of the barrenness of the lagoon, and the sorrow of her people; a city of graceful arcades and gleaming walls, veined with azure and warm with gold, and fretted with white sculpture like frost upon forest branches turned to marble. And yet, in this beauty of her youth, no city of thoughtless pleasure. There was still a sadness of heart upon her, and a depth of devotion, in which lay all her strength.”† But how she rose to the climax of her greatness, Byzantine changing into Gothic; and how she decayed in the gradual strengthening of a soulless renaissance—Titian and Tintoret, in their later days, “choosing the delight;”—the change “from the marble shaft, and the lancet arch, and the wreathed leafage, and the glowing and melting harmony of gold and azure, to the square cavity in the brick wall”:—all this must be read

* *Stones of Venice*, iii., 170.

† *Stones of Venice*, ii., 143.

in the "Stones of Venice" itself. It is the envisaging of the one idea, that the Venetian builders' art depended on the "moral or immoral temper of the state." And the justification of the place given to Gothic, over all other architectures, is that it distinctively gives the utmost scope for the expression of the mental state of the builders :—"Gothic architecture was, at all times, the architecture both of the Church and of the Tavern : the house of God and the house of Man showing thus their integral connexion."

To bring all this art teaching to a point. Evidently all these extracts,—which I believe to be central,—group themselves round a point, and that is, the Life of Man. Continual reference is made through all these books of Ruskin to two things :—the power of self realization in man, and the perfectness of all the work of God. But these two are always connected. Nature and man alike are the work of God, but man is that for which nature exists. Nature finds voice only in the soul of man : God reveals Himself only in the dark mirror. Between the silent witness and the breathing image lie the action and reaction of life ; in which interaction it becomes known that God is present in His work, not only as author but as actual life, and the highest religion is seen to be, not a mystical devotion, but a living service—work is worship.

If this is not distinctively an Art theory it is because Ruskin's theory of Art does not separate itself from his theory of Life. Everything in Art is brought to a root in human passion or human hope. It is not a theory of Painting ; it is not a theory of art. It assumes that technical skill is there, and that the special

of Architecture: it has nothing to do with the technical part of any inspiration is there, and then it shows how, in all Art worth the name, these are subordinated to great moral ends, and become the visible history of a noble mind.

Have we not in this the Platonic spirit translated into the language of Art? We should look in vain for a separate theory of Art in Plato. In the Republic he comes into rough collision with the advocates of "Art for Art's sake," and deals but scant justice, one is inclined to think, to those whose art infringed on the well-being of the State. His, in fact, is a theory of Life, the central thought of which is, the realization of the individual only by the loss of his separate interests in the larger life of the State.

What is more than this in Ruskin's theory belongs to the Christian ideal. The Hellenic ideal was the rounding and perfecting of human life. The mediæval Christian ideal subordinated this human life in view of a world to come. These two sides seem to me to be united in that theory which makes all great Art the expression of man's delight in God's work, while it changes the religious outlook from a future Heaven, to a world which is the present realization of Deity.

Having said so much of his earlier writings, which are primarily treatises on Art, let us turn to the great book of his later life, the "Fors Clavigera," and see whether the same Platonic spirit is not evident in it.

"Do you read Ruskin's Fors Clavigera? which he cheerily tells me gets itself reprinted in America. If you don't, do. . . .

There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lighting bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against iniquity, falsity, and baseness, that Ruskin has, and that every man ought to have.”*

The fascination which this book has for students of Ruskin is not easily over-estimated. There is no other book exactly like it; certainly no other where we have a great writer so completely at home. One might describe it as a *Commonplace Book*; for while a main design gradually develops itself in the monthly letters, Ruskin very often left the dictation of his subject to chance—the “third Fors” as he calls it,—and to this happy chance we owe some of the most valuable, as well as most charming passages in all his works. Its definite aim happily allows it the utmost freedom of range. In many parts too it bears the supreme interest of being autobiographical. Ruskin of the “*Modern Painters*” we venerate as the great religious art writer: Ruskin of the “*Fors Clavigera*” we love as a personal leader.

And just because the seven volumes of “*Fors*” are familiar talk, one may say of them what Ruskin says of the teachings of Heaven: “they are given in so obscure, nay, often in so ironical a manner, that a blockhead necessarily reads them wrong.” There is no obscurity in the “*Fors*,” if read continuously from the beginning; but people now-a-days will not take time to read so

* Carlyle to Emerson.

long a book. Now beyond all books that I know, this one admits of texts and extracts utterly misleading and damnable; and so long as an ingenious press can quote passages and suppress contexts, so long we shall get no justice done to the "Fors." What can the hasty reader make of a man who says that "Art in Oxford now is absolutely dependent on our power of solving the question 'why have our little girls large shoes;'"* or says that a singularly extravagant recipe for Goose-pie, quoted *in extenso* and with evident relish, is "closely connected with the primary intentions of 'Fors Clavigera.'"† And yet there is probably no book of Ruskin's which has done so much positive good as this.

To give then any short summary of its main drift and purpose is impossible. It certainly begins as "Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain;" formulates into a definite scheme of social reform, having for object "the highest possible education of English men and women, living by agriculture in their native land;" and, in the fifty-eighth letter of the series, draws up the Constitution and Vow of the St. George's Guild. But this is no more than a back-ground, which serves to throw more into relief the concentrated thought and experience of a long life.

If there is one subject that may be called central in the "Fors," it is the crusade against current Political Economy, or rather against those current aims and ideals of mercantile life which have been sanctioned, even hallowed, by Political Economy. Briefly to sum up his charge against Political Economy:—It is,

* Fors, xxxvii., 3.

† Fors, xxv., 3.

he would say, an analysis of a diseased state of society; of a society in which material wealth is looked on as the goal of individual life, and the struggle for existence is sharpest and cruellest. Instead of being the Economy of a State, it is an economy which disintegrates a State, by putting individual interests before the good of society. It is an economy from which the greatest factor of human life, Social Affection, has been eliminated, and in which Self-interest or Avarice figures as the only constant element. On the other hand true "Political Economy (the economy of a State) consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution; at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things." The typical confession of Ruskin's economical faith is given in the words:—"There is no Wealth but Life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others."*

The point at issue might be put thus. Ruskin does not object to Political Economy, so long as it is confessed *Mercantile Economy*; that is, an analysis of the conditions of modern society on its mercantile side. But to any one who thinks, this mercantile economy is seen coming into constant collision with political economy, in so far as mercantile economy is selfish and individual. The true office, then, of the political economist

* Unto This Last, 156.

would be to point out in which way the interests of the nation can be best served, and the energies of the trader used for the furtherance in life and happiness of all the people; in which the main task would evidently be, not to investigate the laws which regulate the production, distribution, and exchange of material wealth, but to set new ideals of wealth or "well being" before the merchant. Instead of this the economists hitherto have gone little further than their analysis, and have contented themselves with indicating the laws of material wealth, under the conditions, and towards the ideals which a sordid self-interest has raised. In short, economists, he would say, have been merely anatomists when they ought to have been physicians.

Fortunately the days are passed when one might think it vital to defend Ruskin in this. It is a significant sign of the times, that the most earnest upholders of political economy do not any more treat it as an exact science. It is but rare now that an appeal to the "eternal laws of political economy" is taken to settle any question. Indeed, a careful observer of literature may well be perplexed at the position which the "Progress and Poverty" of Mr. Henry George has taken among general readers. It seems to justify the belief that political economy has been but slightly studied and little understood, either by the critics or the supporters of Ruskin. One is almost inclined to hint, that political economy does not come by intuition, and is not necessarily embraced in that wide circle of knowledge, which,—in deference to its entire uncommonness,—we call common sense. This much may be said, that the last great writer on political

economy, Professor Cliffe Leslie—who in this only sums up the gradual tendency of economical thinking for the last few years.—has said that political economy is not a science whose conclusions are final beyond the state of society of which it is the reflex ; in short, that political economy is not a science at all apart from Sociology on the one hand, and Political Philosophy on the other.

Hence the economists may be right from their point of view, and yet Ruskin may be right from his ; and the whole question is, which point of view is correct ? If we take up this question seriously we are apt to get back to a much older one, the answer to which alone will settle it—What is man's chief end ? If it be "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever," we shall need some modification of our economical conclusions. If it should be "to fight for his own hand and enjoy himself for ever" the economists may be right. And yet a third answer is possible ;—things being as they are, we may go by economical rules ; but things being not as they should be, we shall occasionally break them.

That political economy, as hitherto taught, is not a final science, is being shown familiarly enough in much of our legislation, and it is curious enough to find John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin agreeing utterly and entirely on two measures often bitterly spoken of as "breaking through sound economical principles ;" these are tenants' compensation for improvements, and peasant-proprietorship. Even the very catch-word of "sound" political economy, Free Competition, sometimes seems

to be abandoned. Does it not look as if the sweep round had already come when we hear on every hand that the hope of the future is—Co-operation? And what I repeat is, that till we have answered this question—for what purpose is man in the world?—we cannot decide the quarrel between Ruskin and the economists. It is being fought out on a far higher stage than is generally supposed. Not every dabbler in philanthropy or brisk young man in business is able to decide it. The religion of a simpler age gave one solution long ago—in Communism. In the nineteenth century the solution is not so easy as in the time when the Christian Church could meet in an upper room. But the spirit of the age is working out its own problem; and although we are indeed a nation of shopkeepers, dominated by selfish ideals, and working unthinkingly on the old sordid lines, the world must ultimately follow its *thinkers*, however loud, even deafening, the voice of the workers may be. True it for ever remains, that the education of the general mind never stops. “The reveries of the true and simple are prophetic. What the tender poetic youth dreams, and prays, and paints to-day, but shuns the ridicule of saying aloud, shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies, then shall be carried as grievance and bill of rights through conflict and war, and then shall be triumphant law and establishment for a hundred years, until it gives place, in turn, to new prayers and pictures. The history of the State sketches in coarse outline the progress of thought, and follows at a distance the delicacy of culture and of aspiration.”†

† Emerson : *Politics*.

After what has been said, it is, I would hope, superfluous to say that such economical ideas as these are based entirely on the Platonic ideal of the State. Plato and Ruskin alike have said : " in the constitution of the Universe it is written, there is no wealth but Life."

To sum up the whole matter. If I am right in regarding the passages quoted from the early and later works as essential and central, it is not difficult to get at a general idea of the spirit of Ruskin's writings. They are indeed singularly homogeneous. To give us true views of the life of man ; to strip away the sordid theories that blind him to his heritage of admiration, joy, and love ; to show him the infinite beauty of the world ; to remind him that all that God requires of him is to do justice and love mercy ; these are the themes on which his changes are ever rung.

It is no use to judge such a man by ordinary standards. He stands alone, for his work is to point out the absolute truth, not to say how that truth may be realized in a faithless world. This is at once his glory and his condemnation. Ordinary men can scarcely brook the wearing of the prophet's mantle, even by a confessed great man ; we who know better, let us thank God for a great man, and study how we may use the pure truth he gives us to clear the tangled web of our own lives. For as Plato answered long ago, so Ruskin answers now : " I have nothing to do with whether what I tell you is practicable or not ; the only question is, is it true ?"

Yet must one pause before answering that question. It is no

light thing to indict a whole civilization. May we not confess that things are indeed far from right, without saying that the only way of reform is to overthrow? And here I think the most devoted admirer of Ruskin may remember with significance a passage in the "Modern Painters," which says :—"the most startling fault of the age being its faithlessness, it is necessary that its greatest man should be faithless."* The words were spoken of Walter Scott; we might apply them differently. Faithless, I mean, that in sight of this "roaring volcano of fate, of material values, glutted markets and low prices,"† he seems sometimes to lose hope and faith alike. It is the more necessary for us to remember that the mills of the gods grind slowly. The world is old; the modern spirit is very young. It is not to be wondered at that trade, so long confined to hand labour, to agriculture, and to supplying the wants of a scanty population, should shoot beyond its mark, when the enormous powers of steam and capital were put into its hand, and play with its edged tool till it discovers that such toys may cost too much. And when science is every day increasing the tremendous power of man, and wresting from nature the secrets we must believe a beneficent Creator put there, can we wonder that it is intoxicated with success, and thinks itself almost a god?

Through all this the world must pass. It is not possible to turn the wheels of time backward. We must attain through progressing. It seems inborn in man to believe that the former days were better than now. Even Plato thought the barbarous hymns

* V. 270.

† Emerson : *English Traits*.

of the Egyptians a music whose loss was to be deplored ; while Ruskin looks back to the sixteenth century with longing eyes. But while we look to the past for lesson, we must not look to it for goal. Every force that is in the world must have its evolution: it cannot be destroyed: it can only be guided or transformed. Self Realisation is the law of individual life ; it is the law of society also. In both cases we too readily forget that the true Self Realisation of spiritual beings is through Self Sacrifice.

“ Whosoever shall lose his life shall save it : ”—that is the very heart of Christianity. But up till now we have made much of Evolution, little of Realization. We have hailed every triumph of Art, every advance of Science, every rush of Trade as a good in itself. Art for Art’s sake, Science an end in itself, every man for himself—these are our common-places. Is it not time to remember that the true glory of these is not in themselves, but in the help they afford to the healthy and beautiful life of man ? We have still, it seems, to learn the lesson of the Greeks : that art and science and trade must be sacrificed in their selfishness to come to their true life and dignity as ministers to the common weal. There is not one theory of Art, and another theory of Life. Everything in this whirling kaleidoscope of being falls into its place as it becomes minister to the life of Man.

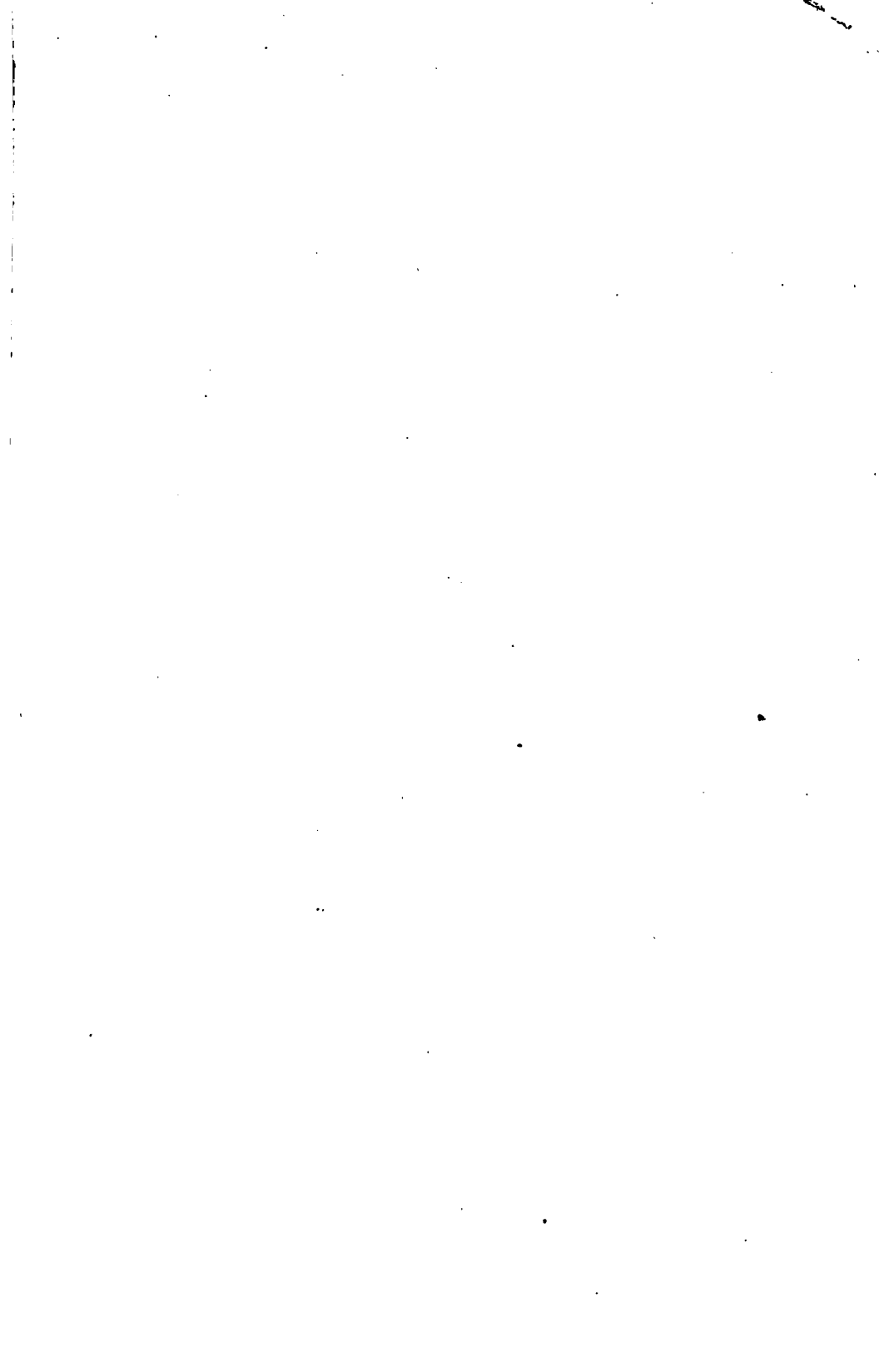
It is the old Greek lesson which this Disciple of Plato has so faithfully taught :—on Earth there is nothing great but Man. And the great aim of Ruskin’s writings, from the “ Modern Painters ” to the “ Fors Clavigera,” has been to teach this great religion of

humanity—that the truest worship of God lies, not in the shibboleths of creeds, but in the helpful service of man to man.

The honour of God in the service of Man—that is the spirit of John Ruskin.

NOTE BY MR. RUSKIN.

*“There is no word I want to add or change up to page 41 ;
“but, as regards what follows, I would like to add that, while I
“admit there is such a thing as mercantile economy, distinguished
“from social, I have always said also that neither Mill, Fawcett,
“nor Bastiat knew the contemptible science they professed to teach.”*



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